

Amendments to the Claims

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently Amended) A fastener assembly comprising:

 a fastening element; and

 a fastener comprising:

 a base;

 a housing connected to the base and including an opening, the housing adapted to retain the fastening element when the fastening element is inserted in the housing via the opening; and

 a latch flexibly connected to a region of the base located on a side of the housing including the opening such that the latch can be moved relative to the housing and positioned relative to the housing to retain the fastening element by interference between a portion of the latch and a lateral surface of the fastening element, the latch including a surface that is proximate the opening in the housing, wherein the surface is externally accessible with the fastening element retained in the housing, the latch configured such that the fastening element can be removed from the housing only by withdrawing the fastening element~~fastener~~ out the opening over the portion of the latch and only when a force is applied directly to the surface proximate the opening to flex the latchand move the portion of the latch,

 wherein the latch is constructed to locate the portion of the latch between the region of the base to which the latch is flexibly connected and a location of the fastening element when the fastening element is retained in the housing.

2. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 1, wherein the base includes a flange and wherein the housing and the latch are both connected to the flange.

3. (Original) The fastener of claim 2, wherein the flange is configured so that it can be connected to a sheet of material.
4. (Original) The fastener of claim 3, wherein each of the flange and sheet of material comprise a thermoplastic and the flange and sheet of material are heat sealed together.
5. (Original) The fastener of claim 1, wherein the housing comprises a side wall and a retaining lip.
6. (Original) The fastener of claim 5, wherein the retaining lip comprises a notch to accommodate a fastening element attachment mechanism.
7. (Original) The fastener of claim 5, wherein the side wall comprises a semi-circular section.
8. (Canceled).
9. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 1, wherein the latch is flexible.
10. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 1, wherein the latch comprises a flange generally parallel to a base of the housing and projecting towards the interior of the housing.
11. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 1, wherein the portion of the latch includes a contour corresponding to a shape of the fastening element.
12. (Original) The fastener of claim 1, wherein the fastener is formed in a sheet of material.
13. (Currently Amended) A fastener assembly, comprising:
 - a fastening element; and
 - a fastener comprising:

a base;

a housing connected to the base and including an opening, the housing sized and adapted to retain the fastening element; and

a latch flexibly connected to a region of the base located on an open side of the housing such that the latch can be moved relative to the housing and positioned relative to the housing so that the latch in combination with the housing retains the fastening element, the latch including a surface that is proximate the opening in the housing, wherein the surface is externally accessible with the fastening element retained in the housing, the latch configured such that the fastening element can be removed from the housing only by withdrawing the fastening elementfastener out the opening and only when a force is applied directly to the surface proximate the opening to flex the latch.

14. (Previously Presented) The fastener assembly of claim 13, wherein the fastening element is flexible.

15. (Previously Presented) The fastener assembly of claim 13, wherein the housing is flexible.

16 -17. (Canceled).

18. (Currently Amended) A fastener that can be attached to a first surface, comprising:
a base;

a housing connected to the base, the housing comprising a retaining lip having a second surface, at least a portion of the second surface being substantially parallel to the first surface, the housing being sized and adapted to retain a fastening element; and

a latch flexibly connected to a region of the base located on an open side of the housing and positioned relative to the housing such that the latch in combination with the housing retains the fastening element, wherein the latch comprises a first portion to which pressure is applied when the fastening element is moved into engagement with the fastener and a second portion comprising a third surface disposed intermediate the first surface and the second surface upon

which the fastening element rests when in an engaged position, at least a portion of the third surface being substantially parallel to the first surface, wherein the first portion is externally accessible with the fastening element retained in the housing,

wherein the first portion is located adjacent an opening in the housing by which the fastening element is inserted into and removed from the housing, respectively, and

wherein the latch is configured such that the fastening element can be removed from the housing only via the opening and only when a force is applied directly to the first portion to flex the latch.

19. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 18, wherein the base includes a flange and wherein the housing and the latch are both connected to the flange.

20. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 19, wherein the flange is configured so that it can be connected to a sheet of material.

21. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 20, wherein each of the flange and the sheet of material comprise a thermoplastic, and wherein the flange and the sheet of material are configured to be heat sealed together.

22. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 18, wherein the housing comprises a side wall and a retaining lip.

23. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 22, wherein the retaining lip comprises a notch to accommodate a fastening element attachment mechanism.

24. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 22, wherein the side wall comprises a semi-circular section.

25. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 18, wherein the housing is flexible.

26. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 18, wherein the latch is flexible.

27. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 18, wherein the latch comprises a flange generally parallel to the base, the latch projecting towards an interior of the housing.

28. (Previously Presented) The fastener assembly of claim 13, wherein the base includes a flange connected to both the housing and the latch, and wherein the flange is made of thermoplastic.

29. (Previously Presented) The fastener assembly of claim 13, wherein the base includes a flange connected to both the housing and the latch, and wherein the flange and an inflatable bladder are heat sealed together.

30. (Previously Presented) The fastener assembly of claim 13, wherein the housing comprises a side wall and a retaining lip.

31. (Previously Presented) The fastener assembly of claim 30, wherein the retaining lip comprises a notch to accommodate a fastening element attachment mechanism.

32. (Previously Presented) The fastener assembly of claim 30, wherein the side wall comprises a semi-circular section.

33. (Previously Presented) The fastener assembly of claim 13, wherein the latch comprises a portion corresponding to a shape of the fastening element.

34. (Previously Presented) The fastener assembly of claim 13, wherein the latch is positioned relative to the housing to retain the fastening element by interference with a lateral surface of the fastening element.

35-54. (Canceled).

55. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 1, wherein the fastener is attached to an object and the flexible portion of the base flexes in a direction of the object.

56-61. (Canceled).

62. (Currently Amended) A fastener assembly comprising:

a fastening element; and

a fastener comprising:

a base having a flexible portion;

a housing connected to the base and including an opening; and

a latch flexibly connected to the base,

wherein the housing is adapted to retain the fastening element so that a surface of the latch located proximate the opening in the housing is externally accessible with the fastening element retained in the housing such that the fastening element can be removed from the housing only by withdrawing the fastening element~~fastener~~ out the opening and only when a force is applied directly to the surface proximate the opening to depress the latch,

wherein the latch includes a portion that is positioned relative to the housing to retain the fastening element by interference with a lateral surface of the fastening element, and

wherein a location of the fastening element is centered about an axis perpendicular to the fastener when the fastening element is retained in the housing, and wherein a distance between the portion of the latch and the axis increases when the force is applied to the surface proximate the opening to depress the latch.

63. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 62, wherein the base includes a flange and wherein the housing and the latch are both connected to the flange.

64. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 63, wherein the flange is configured so that it can be connected to a sheet of material.

65. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 64, wherein each of the flange and sheet of material comprise a corresponding thermoplastic and the flange and sheet of material are sealed together.

66. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 62, wherein the housing comprises a side wall and a retaining lip.

67. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 66, wherein the retaining lip comprises a notch to accommodate a fastening element attachment mechanism.

68. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 66, wherein the side wall comprises a semi-circular section.

69. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 62, wherein the latch is flexible.

70. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 62, wherein the latch comprises a flange generally parallel to the base of the housing and projecting towards an interior of the housing.

71. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 62, wherein the latch comprises a portion corresponding to the shape of the fastening element.

72. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 62, wherein the fastener is formed in a sheet of material.

73. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 62, wherein the housing is configured such that the latch is accessible such that an external force can be applied by an operator's finger to depress the latch.

74. (Cancelled).

75. (Previously Presented) The fastener assembly of claim 13, wherein the fastener is configured to permit the fastening element to be withdrawn from the housing over the latch.

76. (Previously Presented) The fastener assembly of claim 13, wherein the fastener is configured such that the region of the base remains externally accessible with the fastening element retained in the housing and the fastener coupled to an object.

77. (Previously Presented) The fastener assembly of claim 76, wherein the object includes an inflatable bladder.

78. (Previously Presented) The fastener assembly of claim 77, wherein the fastener assembly is coupled to the inflatable bladder, and wherein a resistance provided by an inflation level of the inflatable bladder resists the force applied to the surface proximate the opening to flex the latch.

79. (Currently Amended) A fastener assembly, comprising:

a fastening element; and

a fastener, comprising:

a base;

a housing connected to the base and including a retaining lip and an opening, the housing sized and adapted to retain the fastening element; and

a latch flexibly connected to a region of the base located on a side of the housing including the opening such that the latch can be moved relative to the housing, the latch positioned relative to the housing to retain the fastening element within the housing upon sliding the fastening element over the latch and under the retaining lip;

wherein the latch is manually depressible relative to the fastening element to permit the fastening element to be slid out of the housing over the latch and the region of the base,

wherein the fastening element can be slid out of the housing over the latch only when the latch is depressed by an application of a force directly to a surface of the latch proximate the opening and only by sliding the fastening element from the housing via the opening,

wherein the surface is exposed with the fastening element retained in the housing.

80. (Previously Presented) The fastener assembly of claim 79, wherein the base is configured so that it can be connected to a sheet of material.

81. (Previously Presented) The fastener assembly of claim 80, wherein the base includes a thermoplastic, and wherein the base is configured so that it can be heat sealed to the sheet of material.

82. (Previously Presented) The fastener assembly of claim 79, wherein the retaining lip comprises a notch to accommodate a fastening element attachment mechanism.

83. (Previously Presented) The fastener assembly of claim 79, wherein the base is configured to be connected a bladder.

84. (Previously Presented) The fastener assembly of claim 83, wherein the latch is configured such that the latch flexes in a direction of the bladder.

85. (Previously Presented) The fastener assembly of claim 79, wherein the latch is configured relative to the housing to retain the fastening element by interference with a lateral surface of the fastening element.

86. (Previously Presented) The fastener assembly of claim 79, wherein the fastener is configured such that the latch remains externally accessible with the fastening element retained in the housing and the fastener coupled to an object.

87. (Previously Presented) The fastener assembly of claim 86, wherein the object includes an inflatable bladder.

88. (Previously Presented) The fastener assembly of claim 87, wherein the fastener assembly is coupled to the inflatable bladder, and wherein a resistance provided by an inflation level of the inflatable bladder resists a force applied to flex the latch.

89. (Previously Presented) The fastener assembly of claim 1, wherein the location of the fastening element is centered about an axis perpendicular to the fastener when the fastening element is retained in the housing, and wherein a distance between the portion of the latch and the axis increases when the force is applied to the surface proximate the opening to flex the latch.

90. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 13, wherein the latch includes a portion that is positioned relative to the housing to retain the fastening element by interference with a surface of the fastening element, and wherein the latch is constructed to locate the portion of the latch between the region of the base to which the latch is flexibly connected and a location of the fastening element when the fastening element is retained in the housing.

91. (Previously Presented) The fastener assembly of claim 13, wherein the latch includes a portion that is positioned relative to the housing to retain the fastening element by interference with a surface of the fastening element, and wherein a location of the fastening element is centered about an axis perpendicular to the fastener when the fastening element is retained in the housing, and wherein a distance between the portion of the latch and the axis increases when the force is applied to the surface proximate the opening to flex the latch.

92. (Previously Presented) The fastener of claim 62, wherein the latch is constructed to locate the portion of the latch between a region of the base to which the latch is flexibly connected and the location of the fastening element when the fastening element is retained in the housing.